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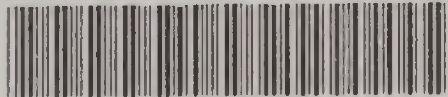
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STORY OF THE WRITING OF THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER

BY

JOHN WATSON VAN DEMAN

NINETEEN TWENTY-ONE

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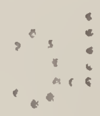
Dedication

To the National Patriotic Instructors of America, whom I am proud to claim as fellow-workers in sowing the seeds of Patriotism broadcast throughout our land, I respectfully dedicate this little book.

THE AUTHOR.



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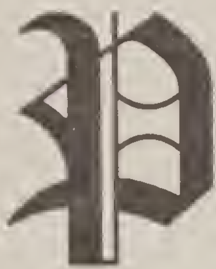
FOREWORD



ERHAPS a few words here will not be out of place in explanation of my reason for taking it upon myself to write the history of this song we all love. It may seem strange that a man living in Michigan, so far away from the place where these scenes occurred, and so long after the time of their occurrence, should be sufficiently interested in them, and in the right understanding of them by all Americans, to assume this task.

There has ever been a strong vein of Patriotism in my family. My great-grandfather came with a colony of his parishioners to Germantown, Pa., before the Revolution. He was of the type of immigrants so quaintly described in Whittier's "Pennsylvania Pilgrim".

My grandfather was with Washington at Valley Forge, was wounded at the battle of Brandywine, and was also in an expedition against the Indians at Point Pleasant, Virginia, where one of his brothers was scalped but not tomahawked.

Just after the Revolution my grandfather came to the Scioto Valley in Ohio, began a clearing, and started a crop of corn. He then walked back to Pennsylvania to get his pay from the Government, which had been long overdue. He received in payment a land grant.

Two of my uncles started from southern Ohio for upper Sandusky, to enlist in the War of 1812. One of them, my Uncle Conrad, died of measles at a camp on the Olentangy river, near Delaware, Ohio. I remember when a lad, being with my parents at his grave.

My mother's grandfather was a Sergeant Case, of Canton, Connecticut. Perhaps because of this ancestry, I have always been deeply interested in all that has led to our country's growth and preservation, and as Patriotic Instructor of my Grand Army Post (No. 372 Dep't Michigan) I have felt that in speaking to the schools of my department, I ought to do my "bit" toward bringing the history and true meaning of this

grand song before my hearers by telling them some of the facts it has been my good fortune to learn about the when, the where, the how and the why, of the writing of the Star Spangled Banner; and as it was impossible for me to present these facts personally before every school in the land, I have put them into booklet form, hoping in this way to widen my field of usefulness in the cause of Patriotism.

I hope that, as people young and old hear and read my story, their interest in Patriotic Songs may be increased, and many be led to memorize not only the Star Spangled Banner, but scores of similar songs. That they may write essays and deliver orations showing their love for their country, and be spurred on to help spread this story until it is known in millions of "little red schoolhouses" all over the land, as well as in High Schools and Academies.

Wherever it goes, may blessings go with it.

JOHN WATSON VAN DEMAN,

December, 1919. Benzonia, Michigan.

"I Know a Land"

I know a land where welcome waits
  Each honest heart, whate'er its race;
That opens wide its friendly gates,
  And finds for all a chance and place.
Of that dear land my song shall be,
    The land I love, America.

I know a land so fair and broad
  Where men are free to think and toil;
Where honest zeal wins just reward,
  And all may own and till the soil.
No other land so broad and free,
    The land I love, America.

There mighty rivers seek the sea,
  And fertile plains roll mile on mile;
There ring the songs of Liberty,
  And lives are blessed beneath her smile,
O ever dear, that land shall be,
    The land I love, America.

There happy homes 'neath sunny skies,
  Make glad the hearts that hold them dear;
There shines the light in women's eyes,
  The light we love, undimmed by fear.
Oh land so beautiful and free,
    The land I love, America.

Oh, in that land my home shall be,
  Where'er my birth-place may have been;
To thee I pledge my fealty,
  None else shall my allegiance win.
Oh, I would give my life for thee,
    Dear land I love, America.

Written by Mrs. Mary K. Buck,
Traverse City, Mich.

STORY OF THE WRITING OF THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER

IN the beginning of the year 1915, the attention of the people of the State of Michigan was called to two of the patriotic songs of our Nation. The Honorable Fred. L. Keeler, Commissioner of Education, issued circulars to all the schools of the State, directing the pupils to memorize, during the first two weeks of February, the words of "America" and "The Star-Spangled Banner."

In those weeks these songs were well fixed in the minds of thousands of Michigan's young people. It was a valuable addition to their education and many other states might "Go and do likewise". It was a good work, far-reaching as the life of our Nation.

To the words of the first of these songs, so many eulogies have been written that I would not presume to add anything; but regarding the second, it seems to me much may be said in addition to that which has been previously known, in explanation of the cause of its being written, that will increase its historical value, and awaken new interest in the minds of all Americans.

It may be that having these scenes described by one who has been on the very ground where they occurred, may arouse additional interest in teachers and pupils. In this case, they will be more than welcome to any help they may be able to draw from these facts I have gathered with so much pleasure.

My regiment (the 60th O. V. I. 1st Edition) had passed up Chesapeake Bay and the Patapsco River channel past Ft. McHenry, from Annapolis to Baltimore at the time of the battle of Antietam in our Civil War, and it had long been my wish to re-visit the place where this song had been written.

I knew that the Centennial of its writing was to be celebrated at Baltimore in September, 1914, but owing to the frail health of my wife, I did not go; but when I found I could attend the National Encampment of the G. A. R. which was to meet at Washington, D. C., in the Fall of 1915, I resolved to go, knowing that if I got to Washington, I could soon get to Baltimore.

On September 28th, 1915, with the aid of my cane, I marched in parade on that grandest of streets, Pennsylvania Avenue, where, more than fifty years before, on June 24th, and 25th, 1865, 80,000 men, home from the Union armies, in the prime of life, followed the bugle, the fife, and the drum in that great parade proudly and gallantly tho' saddened by the thought that the martyred Lincoln—the greatest man of the English speaking race—for whom they had fought, could not witness their victorious return to the homes they had defended.

Now, on September 28th, 1915, less than 20,000 veterans of the G. A. R. marched in parade; many with "falt'ring steps and slow" but all with undaunted, jubilant hearts, carrying battle-flags half a century old.

The line of march led from the Capitol to the Treasury Building, then North and West past the front of the White House where stood President Wilson on his reviewing stand waving his hat to this remnant of the Grand Army; then ending the parade in front of the magnificent Army and Navy Building; marching all the way between crowds of cheering citizens and beneath clouds of starry flags.

Then, one Autumn morning, October 4th, my long delayed wish was realized, and I boarded a trolley car on the Washington, Baltimore and Annapolis R. R. and in less than two hours was on the historic ground of Ft. McHenry.

This was for many years a United States Reservation, but had lately been dedicated to the city of Baltimore as a park. It is on a point jutting out into the Patapsco River, from which there is a commanding view of Baltimore Harbor. The fort had at that time no guards, guides or officials to show me points of interest. A few men were mowing weeds and spraying kerosene upon the pools of water. I climbed up on some of the largest guns; eighteen pounders were "Great Guns" in 1814.

I stood at the base of a monument erected to the memory of Col. George Armistead, who commanded the fort on Septemer 13th and 14th, 1814, when the British were defeated decisively and forced to retreat down the Bay.

I gazed sea-ward "Thro' the mists of the deep" for there were still, at 11 A. M. that day, clouds of fog hiding some of the ships that were coming and going in the harbor.

There had been, at the time of the Centennial, a Govern-

ment Buoy located in the ship channel leading down the bay, showing as nearly as could be determined by the testimony of the survivors of those battles where lay the *"Minden"*, the ship on which Francis Scott Key and his companions were prisoners of war when this song was written. This buoy had been removed by the Government Lighthouse Board, no doubt because it interfered with navigation in the channel.

After leaving the fort I visited John Hopkins University, and obtained from one of the professors a book called "Maryland in the War of 1812". This book is authority for many of my statements, and is no doubt correct. From the U. S. Coast Survey I obtained charts showing the rivers and bays where the British ships sailed, and of the Maryland peninsula where the red-coated soldiers marched in attacking Washington City. I also obtained a book published by the U. S. Government containing facsimiles of several copies of the song as written out for friends of the author by himself. I heard some stories and saw some relics of those days.

The causes of the war and conditions at that time I leave to textbooks or to other authors. My object now is to tell what I was privileged to find out in my visit to Baltimore to study this subject. I hope to make clear many points which have not been well or widely known until since the Centennial referred to I had lived on these shores three years, from 1892 to 1895, employed in the oyster business among the people whose grandsires built, manned and sailed American ships and fought and won these battles.

This story has to be spread over a panorama of about 10,000 square miles, and a month's time. It covers the marching of 4,000 red-coated soldiers from the mouth of the Potomac River to Washington City, its capture by them, and their return to their base laden with spoils. Then, their second expedition aimed at Baltimore by these same soldiers eager for another easy victory, and also a fleet of England's most powerful warships. After this expedition had failed in its attacks both by land and sea, and had begun its retreat, this song was written.

This was a time of great moment in the history of our country. This Government "of the people, by the people, for the people" was as yet an experiment which the crowned heads

of Europe and tyrants everywhere hoped would soon be crushed out. There had been opposition to the declaration of war against so great a power as England; there was still opposition by Tories and Slackers. Unpreparedness was abroad then as it was in the 20th century to the great sorrow and detriment of our land. We might have again become vassals of Great Britain had not the courage of the men of Maryland, New Jersey and Pennsylvania risen to the occasion.

This song was written among the echoes of roaring cannons, bursting bombs and screaming rockets, by a man who had just seen the fair Capitol of this new Republic laid waste by its foes. Its public buildings, its President's house, its Capitol, in ashes; its defenders in panic-stricken, inglorious retreat.

This great patriotic song may be more of an uplift and inspiration to those who read it, hear it, sing it or hear it sung, if they understand some of the details of the hardships and horrors attending its writing, as told to their sons and families by many survivors who still lived at the time of our Civil War. It may also be interesting to know that the very same flag mentioned in the song is still in existence in the museum at Washington where its ancient folds are carefully suspended in a covering of netting to preserve them, and where it will probably remain as long as its threads hold together. It had fifteen stars and fifteen stripes; each stripe was twenty-four inches wide, making the width of the entire flag thirty feet; its length being forty feet. From 1795 to 1818 the U. S. flag contained this number of stripes but as the number of states increased it was seen that to add a stripe for each one would make the flag too bulky, so it was decided to return to the original thirteen stripes, adding another star to the field for each new state. The "Francis Scott Key Flag" as it is called, has now only fourteen stars, one star having been cut from its field and presented to President Lincoln during his administration.

This song was written on board the sloop or schooner *"Minden"*, a U. S. messenger ship lying at anchor among the British fleet in the ship channel of the Patapsco River, below Baltimore in sight of Ft. McHenry, between dawn and dark on Septemer 14th, 1814. The record plainly says the first copy was written on the back of a letter found in the pocket of the author. The particulars here following may help to show "why" it was written.

England being at war with France, embargoes forbidding our ships to attempt to carry freight or merchandise to Europe, because they would most certainly be captured by one or the other of the warring nations, had caused them to stay at home, rotting at their wharves for years before the war of 1812 began.

At the outset the U. S. Navy had only seven two-masted square-rigged ships called Frigates, and a few smaller vessels some of them unseaworthy, but they at this time had won their way into prominence by their success whenever they had a fair chance. The British navy had 1000 ships of war in active service fully equipped; but the Americans had 100,000 seamen as good as ever trod a deck or reefed a tops'l. This was acknowledged by the British statesmen in their debates.

Now was the test upon us. Was our fond dream of a Republic, a government by the consent of the governed, a government of and by the people to fail or succeed? Was our appeal to the God of battles unheard? This land of refuge to which our colonies had come and to which the oppressed of all nations had been coming, should it fail? If we failed, to whom should the oppressed turn? England ruled the seas; could we resist her, and keep our own little barque afloat?

Our capital was practically on the sea-board, but we thought it was protected in great measure from easy approach by its distance up the crooked Potomac River; and we also thought that we would have time that spring to gather militia and to fortify our ports against our foes.

Our country was mainly settled and improved along the sea-board and was in greatest danger there. The states easiest reached from the ocean felt the pressure most. Our resources were undeveloped as yet, and almost unknown; still we held on; we kept our course. We could no longer endure the capture and impressment of our seamen into the British navy because they had once been Englishmen. Baltimore had been one of the first to respond to the call to arms. The Virginia Capes were an easy landfall to invaders and people there had suffered severely. Our cities being coast towns our products having always to be carried to foreign ports, our people were on the alert, and on the declaration of war they sprang to arms, especially on the sea, to resist invading ships.

Although England "ruled the seas" she had not enough warships to protect her merchant vessels, so according to the custom of that time, our congress authorized the fitting out of small warships called *Privateers* by any citizen who had the means and ability to build and man them. To these *Privateers* the President issued "Letters of Marque and Reprisal". A copy of one of these documents follows.

PRIVATEER'S COMMISSION.

By the President of the United States of America.

Suffer the Big INCA of Baltimore, Maryland, Alexander Thompson Master or Commander, burthen of two hundred and thirty (230) and three ninety-fifths (3/95) Tons or thereabouts, mounted with two (2) guns, navigated with twenty-two (22) men, to pass with her company, passengers, goods and merchandise without hindrance, seizure or molestation; the said ship appearing by good testimony to belong to one or more of the citizens of the U. S. A. and to him or them only.

Given under my hand and the seal of the United States of America, on the 23rd day of October in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and thirteen.

By the President, James Madison.

James Monroe, Secretary of State.

Countersigned, James H. McCullough, Collector.

This Commission authorized the *Privateers* to capture English vessels, but required them to observe the rights of neutrals, and the usages of civilized warfare.

Within one month after war was declared, 65 American vessels were fitted out at Baltimore, armed, manned by American sailors, and out at sea, bringing in British ships as prizes, or, after taking off the crew and passengers as prisoners, and taking as much of the cargo as they wanted, or could carry, burning the ships at sea. In this way American seamen won the war, and English shipping was nearly swept off the seas.

England was engaged in war against Napoleon Bonaparte and could not bring her warships or troops across the Atlantic at once in great numbers, but by March 26th, 1813 the entire coast of the United States (excepting Rhode Island, New Hampshire and Massachusetts) was declared blockaded by

England. The state government of these three states had objected to the war and the British regarded them as friendly to their cause, and hoped if they were not subjected to the discomfort of the blockade they might be induced to join forces with the invaders against the United States.

The English ships had been filled with soldiers from the scum of the European armies, who committed wholesale robberies at many places where they landed. Especially cruel were they at Hampton and at Ocracoke Inlet, in 1812 and 1813. Lord Napier, a distinguished and honorable English admiral, said that many of these ruffians should have been shot by their Commander Lord Cockburn, who allowed and encouraged them to plunder and terrify the inhabitants. Along with the plunder the British ships carried away in the fall of 1813 were 170 negro slaves, taken to Bermuda from the coast towns of Maryland and Virginia.

In the spring of 1814 the English made up a large fleet to finish the subjugation of the United States. Fifty ships of war and three transports carrying 4000 soldiers under Gen. Robert Ross, sailed in July from the English channel, stopping at Bermuda, arriving at the Capes of Virginia August 10th, and in Chesapeake Bay at Point Lookout at the mouth of the Potomac River August 15th.

The only force the Americans had ready on this part of our coast, with which to meet this invading host, was a little flotilla of 30 small gunboats and barges using oars and sails, that had been collected in Maryland by a noble sailor named Barney. This Captain John Barney had distinguished himself early in the war by sailing in the *Privateer Rossie* on July 12th, 1812, returning November 10th of the same year. In less than four months he captured 4 English ships, 8 brigs, 3 schooners and 13 sloops, valued with their cargoes at more than $1,500,000. The U. S. Government then gave him a Commodore's Commission in our growing navy. His little fleet lay in a river which I must now describe, the Patuxent.

The crooked Potomac River which figured so largely in our Civil War, comes down from the summit of the Alleghenies forming the peculiar western boundary of Maryland for hundreds of miles; this was the stream on which the British fleets were expected to come to attack Washington City, our Capital, which was to be defended now if ever.

Between this river and Chesapeake Bay, lies a peninsula containing three counties: Prince George, out of the northern corner of which was taken part of the District of Columbia; Charles Co. in the middle, and St. Marys Co. at the south where the Potomac flows into Chesapeake Bay at Point Lookout. Much of this land is flat and swampy and was mostly in forest at that time. Plantations were at the head of the creeks and small bays, and towns were built on the points jutting out into the rivers and larger bays.

Coming down through this peninsula parallel to Chesapeake Bay is this Patuxent River I have mentioned; a tidewater stream navigable for ships 25 miles from its mouth, for barges 25 miles farther, and for oyster boats and bateaux nearly to its head which is not far from Baltimore.

Instead of sending a fleet 200 miles up the crooked Potomac, the British could come up that river for 50 miles to Port Tobacco, and march their soldiers 54 miles due north to the U. S. Navy Yard at Washington. Here was a bridge one-half mile long which the British expected would be stoutly defended or perhaps burned to prevent their approach to Washington from that direction.

But there was a shorter route that had been worked out by the British admiral and Lord Cockburn during the campaign of the previous years that they were careful to say nothing about until they were ready to march upon Washington. This was to go up Chesapeake Bay to the mouth of the Patuxent at St. Leonard's Bay and from there up the river to a point only about 22 miles from the Capital, thus taking the American army by surprise and from an entirely unexpected quarter. In this they succeeded only too well.

The American army of the Potomac was not yet organized. On July 1st Commodore Barney had been summoned from his flotilla on Leonard's Creek at the mouth of the Patuxent, to Washington to consult about the defense of that city, and Baltimore. He was ordered to send his 1st lieutenant and 400 men with 14 of his barges up the Chesapeake Bay to aid in the defense of Baltimore, and to retain 500 men with the rest of the flotilla to oppose Admiral Cockburn's ships, but to retire before him, and if pressed too hard to burn his boats to prevent the enemy from getting them.

Barney alone was ready. All else was unpreparedness. On July 4th Congress had waked up and authorized the Secretary of War to issue a requisition upon all the states for 93,500 men to defend the Union. Owing to a defect in the militia laws of Pennsylvania she could send no men immediately. Out of the quota called from Virginia, she sent 600 infantry and 300 cavalry. She also sent 2,000 militia but these were without arms or tents.

Maryland responded nobly to the defense of Baltimore, and sent 2,000 well armed Militia for the defense of Washington, to Bladensburg, just before the battle there.

A Militia Colonel or General named Winder (a lawyer) had been appointed Commander of this department of the Potomac; he now began rushing nervously around trying to get these raw Militia and independent companies of cavalry and artillery who had never seen war, into shape, to meet and repulse the veterans who had fought successfully against Napoleon's troops in Flanders and the Netherlands. Gen. Winder seemed to have no executive ability nor even the ability to get his men into fighting condition, although he appears to have tried hard to do so. He had 10,000 men assembling to his command, nearly all of them green Militia men who had never been in a battle. They had expected the British to attack Washington via the Potomac River but when they saw the enemy coming up the Patuxent peninsula they began to take notice and prepare to meet them.

President Madison and other officials went out from Washington on August 10th, and reviewed the 2,000 men assembled as the U. S. army in the plains of Maryland toward the Patuxent River near Upper Marlboro. On August 17th Rear-Admiral Malcomb arrived at the mouth of the Potomac with another squadron from England. He sent Capt. J. A. Gordon with the Frigate Seahorse and other warships up the Potomac to attack Fort Washington, 12 miles below our Capital. Capt. Peter Parker with another squadron was sent up Chesapeake Bay to harass and plunder the people on his way to Baltimore, which city was to be attacked when Washington was disposed of.

On August 18th the British started northward the American army keeping ahead of them with scouts and skirmishers.

It seems now, as it did then to a British Subaltern whose journal is preserved, that our Militia might have blocked their advance by felling trees across the narrow roads, and with their good marksmanship wounded and killed many of them, but all that Gen. Winder did was to keep between them and Washington with an occasional stop for skirmishing. On August 20th, the British fleet got up to Benedict on the Patuxent where the channel was found to be too narrow, and the water too shallow for warships. The Admiral put some of his smaller cannons on barges, gunboats and tenders, with all the sailors and marines they could carry, and with wind and tide and oars pushed on up the river, leaving his ships at anchor cared for by marines. The soldiers marching on roads parallel with the river reached Upper Marlboro, the county seat of Prince George Co. on the night of the 21st of August. Before they reached there, on passing the opening above what was then called Pig Point, they came upon Barney's flotilla and attempted to capture it; but in accordance with orders Lieutenant Frazier burned or blew up 15 of the 16 boats and joined Gen. Winder's army at Long Old Fields on the west branch of the Patuxent about 20 miles east of Washington.

Here was held another review of the American troops, and after a slight skirmish with the British who had come up, they retired to the Navy Yard bridge at Washington.

On August 23rd, Gen. Ross moved his troops and the marines from Pig Point to Mt. Calvert and to Upper Marlboro. The same day Gen. Winder advanced from the Navy Yard to Bladensburg about 5 miles east of Washington where he had decided to make a stand. 2,000 Maryland troops had arrived that night from Baltimore via Annapolis, but there was no Commander to take charge of them and they were allowed to pass through the village and camp at the west side, away from the approach of the enemy instead of at the east side where they would have been in position to defend the village and the bridge crossing.

On his way to Bladensburg Gen. Winder and 2,000 troops stopped at a place called the "Wood Yard" 12 miles east of Bladensburg, and held a review or dress parade before the President, seeing at the same time the British army marching to Mt. Calvert on their way to Bladensburg. Then, strange to

say, instead of going on to Bladensburg and arranging for the battle to defend the Capital, he took his troops back to the Navy Yard bridge and prepared it for burning. He seemed to think that Gen. Ross might attack that bridge.

In the morning hearing that the British had started from Mt. Calvert for Bladensburg at daylight, he started all his forces in a great rush to meet them, arriving at the west side of the village at about the same time that the enemy reached the east side. If Gen. Winder had been like Sheridan, Grant or Lee, our 10,000 troops might have won even then.

The British marched through the village at 1:30 P. M. As soon as they came on the bridge where the rifle-men and cannoneers could see them, they were met with what the British soldiers said was as fierce a fire as they had ever met in Europe. They lost about 500 men. Falling back they went above the bridge and waded the river coming thus on the American left flank which they turned back, their bayonets being too much for the Militia. Their second brigade followed, turning our right flank into retreat. Barney's cannoneers fought like heroes and stood at their guns until all others had retreated in confusion. The Commodore was severely wounded and taken prisoner and many of his men were bayonetted. The U. S. had lost only 26 killed and 51 wounded.

The frightened Militia-men halted not their running until they had gone through Washington, over the heights of Georgetown, out into Montgomery Co., Maryland, to its county seat, Rockville.

After resting two hours, the British marched to Washington, halting near the Capitol. Gen. Ross and Admiral Cockburn with some followers rode along the streets expecting to find some person from whom to demand the surrender of the city, who would also offer to pay them an indemnity if they would not burn the public buildings. They found no one. They were fired upon from the windows of a house called the Gallitin; the General's horse was killed and some of his men were wounded or killed. This so enraged them that they burned the house, killed its occupants and began a work of general destruction, burning the Capitol, destroying public records, libraries and everything they chose to. Our Navy Yard officers had set fire to ships and buildings according to orders.

There was only one foreign diplomatic official in the city, Monsieur Serurier of France who lived near the President's house, which had been abandoned by Dolly Madison, that famous hostess. The President had gone to the woods with the army!

Gen. Ross and Admiral Cockburn were seen by Monsieur Serurier to pile up furniture and inflammable materials in these beautiful rooms and set them on fire. Their vengeance overran all proper bounds. Although they had done much plundering on the bays and rivers, yet in many instances when the people let them have all they wanted to carry off, they did no damage or personal injury; but in this case they had an excuse to plead. Early in the spring of 1814 some American soldiers had crossed Lake Erie from Ohio into Canada and burned some distilleries, mills and private houses at Newark.

When Gen. Ross had been at Bermuda in July he had received orders from his Government to retaliate by burning all the government property he could capture until the American Government should be heard from in apology and reparation. This was done later, and the officer who had led the Newark expedition was court-martialed and punished; but of this Gen. Ross had not been informed.

The second brigade of the British had come to Washington by the light of the burning buildings, and all remained at Capitol Hill through the night and the next forenoon; they had not expected such an easy victory and Gen. Ross did not want to risk another battle so far from their ships. Now they saw the American soldiers and Militia-men gathering in from their flight, and feared an attack; but about 2 P. M. a tornado came on, unroofing buildings and scaring both armies. Neither side was ready for fight then. The British took advantage of this condition to make their escape. Toward evening they made up great bon-fires piling on fuel as night advanced and started their retreat at 9 P. M.

On reaching Bladensburg Gen. Ross found that his wounded had been well cared for by the citizens. He made arrangements with Commodore Barney to continue this care, and taking along all who could walk, they hurried to their gunboats and barges, clambered aboard with their plunder and got down to Benedict by nightfall of the 28th.

Here really begins the story of the flag song. As they had gone toward Washington, several of the officers had lodged at the house of Dr. Wm Beanes, a physician at Upper Marlboro on the west branch of the Patuxent. He had treated them well, but as they retreated, some soldiers stopped there to get more plunder. Dr. Beanes headed a company of Militia-men who caught and imprisoned some of these marauders. Word of this reached the British Admirals ship and some dragoons came back, took the Doctor out of his bed, put him on a horse in front of a trooper and carried him to the fleet where they held him prisoner on the Admiral's flagship the "Surprise".

Our authorities at Washington sent a member of an artillery company in Georgetown named Francis Scott Key (a lawyer) and Col. Jno. S. Skinner, flag officer, commanding the "Minden", to the Admiral commanding the fleet at the mouth of the Patuxent with a document asking for the Doctor's release. A copy of this document follows.

Annapolis, Md., August, 1814.

Executive Department of the State of Maryland,

To Gen. Robert Ross,

Commanding British forces.

I am informed that a party from your army a few nights ago, took Dr. Beanes, a respectable aged man out of his bed, treated him with great rudeness and indignity, taking him to your camp; and that he is now on shipboard. The bearer of this goes to your camp conveying some necessaries for the Doctor for his accommodation, and to ascertain what has occasioned this procedure so unusual in warfare among civilized nations. I am persuaded it will only be necessary to enquire into the case to cause the Doctor to be released. I am informed he is an honorable man and would not have been guilty of any act intentionally or knowingly contrary to the usages of war, or derogatory to the character of a man of honor. I hope on inquiry, justice and humanity will induce you to permit the Doctor to return to his family and friends as speedily as possible.

Signed:—Lev. Winder.
Per Col. Jno. S. Skinner
and Francis Scott Key.

Inclosure was: "Pass the bearer to enemy's camp for the purpose of carrying necessaries to Dr. Beanes."

This request was refused, and the messengers were also held because the Admiral did not want them to return to tell of the attack on Baltimore that he was preparing to make. Gen. Ross was saying that he would make his winter headquarters in Baltimore and subjugate the whole coast. " 'Twas a handsome boast, Had they not forgot, alas! to reckon with the host."

As soon as possible the fleet sailed up the bay carrying our poet, his companions and ship with them. On Saturday evening, September 10th, they anchored at the mouth of the Patapsco River at North Point.

On Sunday, September the 11th, the Admiral sent a ship and boats up the river to take soundings and found it was too shallow for the larger men-of-war to get near to Fort McHenry which stood across their way to the city. Our people thought they were intending to land and alarm guns were fired, and congregations left the churches as the American army came down the Neck to oppose them.

At daybreak, on the 12th of September, Gen. Ross and his 3721 soldiers came ashore on North Point. Some Militiamen being captured and brought before the General were asked whether they had many Regulars. The answer was: "Mostly Militia."

"I will take Baltimore if it rains Militia!" said the General. He had ordered his breakfast from a farmer named Gorsuch and after it was eaten and inquiry was made as to whether supper should be prepared for him at the same place he replied: "I will have supper in Baltimore or in Hell."

Our first skirmishers being attacked and driven back, the General rode to the front to see the fun. Two young men, Wells and McComas, had remained hidden behind some fruit trees near a spring. Seeing the General one of them said: "That is he. He rides a white horse today." He had seen him in Washington riding this horse which he had captured after his own animal was shot from under him.

Both young men fired, and the General fell mortally wounded. This checked their advance, though, under Col. Brooke, they pushed our men back some miles up the Neck. Our soldiers fought manfully. It began to rain and they

had to screen the pans of their "flint-lock" guns to keep their powder dry. We had thrown up some earthworks at Hamstead Hill, and here the British land advance was checked and they retreated to North Point before night.

In the meanwhile, Admiral Cockburn had sent 9 "Rocket Boats" and all the ships that could get up the Patapsco channel to bombard the fort, at the time the land attack failed. This bombardment began at daylight on September 13th. The Admiral had put our prisoners off his flagship on to their own boat, the *"Minden"*, and taken them out where they would be exposed to the fire from our guns. The Americans had put up a good number of small earthworks and batteries on the different branches and points of the Patapsco River; our leaders were competent and our men brave regular soldiers with everything prepared as well as it could be since they had really waked up.

The British anchored outside the range of our guns on the fort. Their guns and bombs were heavier than ours, but of the 1600 bombs they threw, only about 400 were found to have fallen inside the fort.

About 3:00 P. M. one of our 18-pounders was thrown off its carriage, and a large body of our men gathered to put it up again. Six of the bombships drew in closer to fire on this crowd, but our gunners raked them so fiercely that they soon got back out of range. Then our men sang out: "Three cheers!" They had the true American spirit in those days.

This was old-fashioned gunnery, not worthy of mention now except as a matter of history. It is said that when the bombs were fired the ships were driven by the rebound two feet into the water.

The fight kept up until about 1 A. M. on September 14th, when the firing ceased. The British now prepared for making a landing, and assault on the fort, sending a great number of small boats supposed to contain 2,000 armed men with ladders to scale the walls and take the fort. As they came near the lights from their own rockets revealed them and our men repulsed them completely, sinking one or two of the boats. They then drew off and began a retreat to their ships and down the bay. Some ships stopped at Tangier Island where they had a large camp as they came up the bay; here they buried the remains of some soldiers who had died after the

bombardment and defeat. The body of Gen. Ross was carried on the Royal Tonnant to Halifax, Nova Scotia, where it was buried with military honors. Captain Peter Parker had been killed in a midnight attack in Maryland, and his body was also taken to Halifax for burial.

Swift sailing vessels carried the word to London of the British failures at Baltimore and also at Lake Erie and Lake Champlain on September 10th and 11th. The American Commissioners secured favorable terms of peace signed at Ghent, December 24th, 1815. The official messenger arrived at New York February 11th, 1816, but a smart skipper named Christopher Hughes Jr. of Baltimore who had sailed from Stockholm in the schooner Transit, reached Annapolis February 12th, and bore the news of peace to Washington before the ratified Treaty had arrived there.

To return to our friends aboard the *"Minden"*. The crisis was passed when the British ships sailed sullenly down the bay. On the deck of the *"Minden"* our poet and his friends looked often at their watches wishing for the daylight to come that they might know their own fate and that of their Nation. Having watched the flag all through the night by the light of bursting bombs, they saw it as the day advanced (it was probably a foggy morning as it had been when I was there) but could not at first distinguish which flag was there. Later on they saw the British carrying wounded men to their ships and were told by their guards that as soon as the fleet was ready to sail they would be released.

No wonder the poet was glad to see "the broad stripes and bright stars", and he wrote down these lines as they came to him on deck during the day, and on the boat going ashore, on the back of a letter he had in his pocket.

When he got ashore and to his hotel, he wrote the poem out in full as it is now. His brother-in-law Judge Nicholson, saw its merit and next morning took it to the office of the "American" which had suspended publication since September 10th, all hands being on the defenses. An apprentice named Samuel Sand set up the type and Thomas Murphy, one of the editors, got leave of absence on September 21st to publish it.

On November 12th it was advertised to be sung by S. S. Mackall at a public meeting. This was the second time it had

been heard in public and it attained great popularity as soon as it was known. Set to the music of "To Ancreon in Heaven" this inspiring song quickly became the anthem of the Nation.

THE SONG.

This song has such a clear historical setting, and, although in poetical measure, contains such plain allusions to the situation that the time, place, and occasion of its writing cannot well be mistaken by any American citizen. That this great patriotic song may be more of an uplift to those who sing it, I have described these scenes to you, and now ask you to think for a moment of the circumstances under which it was written.

Think of the poet and his friends held as prisoners on the little ship out in the bay, exposed to the cannonading all that long rainy day and for half the night; and then, the firing having ceased after midnight, think of their suspense through the tedious hours until the daylight came slowly, and the fog cleared away. Then minute after minute as one glimpse of the flag on the fort came to them through the mist, followed by another and another, clearer and clearer still, imagine their relief and joy when they were finally assured that it was the same flag their eyes had beheld the twilight before.

These lines seem to me to be connected with the booming of cannons, the bursting of shells, the movements of armies, ships and gunboats, and the sullen retreat of the enemy leaving our shores forever. There has seldom been a word-picture so vividly painted. The eagerness expressed in the first line: "Oh say can you see?" brings the whole scene before us and we find ourselves peering with these men of old through "the dawn's early light" in an earnest effort to see if "our flag is still there!"

We share their glad relief as the breeze which "fitfully blows" upon the fog curtains finally drives them away altogether, and the "gleam of the morning's first beam" brings out in their full glory the "broad stripes and bright stars" and no further doubt existed that "the Star Spangled Banner" was waving in triumph over a land that was once more freed from "wild war's desolation".

There is a spirit of true devotion and patriotism in these lines:

"Blest with victory and peace, may the Heav'n rescued land,
Praise the Power that has made and preserved us a Nation."

His confidence that "conquer we must, when our cause it is just" and the perfect faith expressed by the words of the motto "In God is our trust" is surely an inspiration to us all to accept his final declaration that this Star Spangled Banner of ours shall ever wave triumphantly over us, despite the evil efforts of our foes, so long as our homes are "homes of the brave" and our land the "land of the free".

In writing this song, Francis Scott Key has endeared himself to every loyal American citizen, and though, as years roll by, his memory may become dim to the rising generation, I will prophesy that though they may forget the singer, they will never forget the song.

The Star-Spangled Banner

Oh say can you see, by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming,
Whose broad stripes and bright stars, thro' the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watched were so gallantly streaming?
And the rockets red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof thro' the night that our flag was still there.

CHORUS:

Oh say does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free, and the home of the brave?

On the shore dimly seen thro' the mists of the deep,
Where the foes haughty host in dread silence reposes,
What is that which the breeze o'er the towering steep
As it fitfully blows, half conceals, half discloses?
Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam
In full glory reflected now shines on the stream.

CHORUS:

'Tis the star-spangled banner; oh, long may it wave,
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

And where is that band, who so vauntingly swore,
That the havoc of war and the battle's confusion,
A home and a country should leave us no more?
Their blood had washed out their foul footstep's pollution.
No refuge could save the hireling and slave
From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave:

CHORUS:

And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Oh thus be it ever when free men shall stand
Between their loved home and wild war's desolution;
Blest with vict'ry and peace, may the heav'n rescued land
Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation!
Then conquer we must when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto, "In God is our trust".

CHORUS:

And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

A Memorial Day Pageant

Scene aboard the schooner *"Minden"*; in the distance is a fort and slowly coming into view above it, as the conversation goes on, an American flag. Time: Early morning of a foggy day.

Dramatis Personae:—Francis Scott Key of Washington, D. C.
Dr. Wm. Beanes of Upper Marlboro, Md.
Col. Jno. W. Skinner of Baltimore, Md.

American sailors, British guards, etc.

Key:— "Say shipmates, the bomb-shells and rockets seem to to have stopped since that last fierce rush. I wonder if they have taken the fort."

Beanes:— "Captain, it's hours now since we saw any bombs bursting. I wonder if the rain has beaten off the storming party."

Key:— "'Tis awful dark! Dr. Beanes don't you wish you were in Marlboro?"

Beanes:— "Col. Skinner, when will it ever be daylight? Captain, can't you see one bit of glim in the East?"

Skinner:—"No, weather is too thick."

Key:— "Say! I can see the fort outlined on the point. Can you see anything like a flag on it, Captain?"

Skinner:—"No. It's too foggy."

Key:— "Look again!"

Skinner:—"Yes, I believe I can see something red."

Key:— "Look again, all of you! Yes, now it is plainer; the sun shines up there through the fog!"

Beanes:— "It *is* a flag! Is it *ours*? Look hard! See the reflection in the water now! Yes, it is a flag, and Glory! Glory! Glory! it is the *same* flag that we saw yesterday, all day, and all night, until the firing ceased, by the light of the bombs and rockets.

Key:— "Yes, yes, it is! The stars and stripes!"

Beanes:— "Oh, I can see, I can see it is *our* flag that is up there!"

Key:— "Our flag is still there! It's *our flag!* We are not conquered yet!"

Skinner:—"We shall not be kept prisoners on this ship much longer!"

Beanes:— "Oh, it's *our* stripes, and *our* starry flag!"

All:— "Hurrah for *our flag! our flag!* Three cheers! Three cheers! Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!"

As the flag comes plainly into view, the music strikes up and everyone joins in singing:

"The Star Spangled Banner."

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